

POLAND AND THE JEWISH REMNANT

End of a Long History?

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TO VISIT Poland now is to visit tragedy. The scene is bare. Want and penury creep through the streets like yellow smoke over the rubble of a burnt-out house. Yet the human spirit appears triumphant, for it has just won a desperate battle against the Great Lie which for years had been forced on this nation of twenty-seven millions by its mighty neighbor.

Poland, as I saw it recently, is a unique country, where the requirements of common sense go clean against every rule of political logic and every canon of national tradition. For the first time in two decades the January elections to the National Assembly (Sejm) gave people the freedom to reject their rulers by a pencil stroke. Ninety-five per cent of the Poles are anti-Communist, yet during this election they decided, with virtual unanimity, to entrust the government of their country to Wladyslaw Gomulka, the only prominent Communist in present-day Poland.

Gomulka has been a Communist since he was sixteen. He spent years in the prisons of pre-war Poland, where the Communist party was illegal. (In 1938 Stalin finished off the work of the Polish police by killing nearly all the Polish Communist leaders he could lay hands on.) It was the same

Gomulka, now the First Secretary of the United Polish Workers (Communist) party, who in 1948 refused to become a puppet of Moscow and was once again imprisoned, this time by the secret police of Communist Poland. Last year he came out of prison and, on the night of October 19, he advised Khrushchev, Molotov, Mikoyan, and Malenkov, who were visiting Warsaw, to leave immediately or suffer the consequences. Soviet tanks then surrounded Warsaw and other Polish cities with a steel ring, but crack units of the Polish army, aroused university students, and workers stood ready too, determined to resist any attack. In the largest Warsaw printing shop a proclamation calling for a national uprising was already in type on the rotary presses, and the signal was being awaited to start printing. That night, the Communist Gomulka won the leadership of a nation that in its overwhelming majority loathes the economic and political ideas for which he has stood all his life.

In Poland today, only one other man equals Gomulka in prestige—Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski. He and Gomulka are the same age, fifty-one. Each has spent nearly four years in Communist prisons. Both are men of rigorous principles and unbending character. Though they belong to rival organizations that are in bitter competition for the souls of men, and have never met personally, they have entered into an unwritten agreement under which the Communist ruler is granted, as temporal Caesar, what is due unto Caesar, and the Roman Church is recognized as the nation's spiritual home. Only amid the ruins of old Warsaw, destroyed in the autumn of 1944 and threatened twelve years later by a repetition of that fate, could this unique concordat

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have been reached between men from such opposing camps.

Ten years ago Gomulka, as leader of his party, was one of the principal founders of the Cominform, and his party still proclaims monolithic Marxism-Leninism to be the tables of its law. Yet in no country is more intellectual energy devoted to the questioning of the philosophical basis of that monolithism than in Poland. The Polish Djilases are not in prison. They speak at party and trade union meetings; they teach at universities; they edit widely circulated papers and magazines. When the Polish writers assembled this past December to announce their rejection of every residue of Zhdanov's "socialist realism," they elected as their new president a poet who, long before October, had openly and defiantly declared himself a "liberal socialist."

They are reading Orwell's 1984 in Warsaw now, partly to compare that grim fantasy with their own hideous yesterday, but even more to feel the joy of having beaten Big Brother and his Big Lie. They believe they have restored the uncorrupted laws of truth. They always pronounce this noun with a capital "T."

Yet Truth, as some of them have already begun to discover, has many and varied faces. Love for one's own people, their political freedom, and their individual culture can only too easily turn into contempt or even hatred for others. In December a Warsaw theater was showing a play, *Mother*, by the Czech writer Karel Capek. Of all the theaters in Warsaw this was the only one that played to an empty house. The Poles had mistaken it for Maxim Gorky's play of the same name. Gorky had been forced down their throats during the past twelve years—so they boycotted poor Capek.

"You also told me that at the Sixth Plenary Meeting [of the Central Committee of the United Polish Workers party] Comrade Khrushchev raised the question of Comrade Zambrowski, and that he also raised the Jewish question."

This is quoted from the official minutes

of the Eighth Plenary Meeting of the Polish Communist party as published last November in that party's theoretical organ, *Nowe Drogi*. Comrade Ruminski, who spoke these words during a heated exchange with A. Starewicz (a close political friend of Gomulka's), is a leading member of the pro-Moscow faction that was finally routed at this same meeting. Zambrowski ("Chaver Rachmiel" in pre-war days) is a prominent Polish Communist, and a Jew. He had closely collaborated with the old party leadership of Stalinist days, but so had Ochab, Zawadski, and many other members of the Polish party's Central Committee who, like him, were now loyally following Gomulka. Yet at this meeting Zambrowski alone was made the target of personal attacks by the pro-Moscow faction, and it was against him that it concentrated its opposition when the new Politburo was being elected. And when in the recent general elections Zambrowski stood as the Communist party's candidate for the Sejm from Lodz, this pro-Moscow, or "Stalinist," group in the party* continued to single him out for fierce attack.

The verbatim report of the Eighth Plenary Meeting is an indispensable guide for those who want to understand the background of the revolt against Moscow carried out by the Polish Communists. The report makes it clear that anti-Semitism is being deliberately exploited by the pro-Moscow minority in the Polish party, which sees in Gomulka an enemy of Soviet Russia and a dangerous deviator from orthodox Communism (especially in the matter of the forced collectivization of land, which he has rejected), and is ready to use any weapon against him and his supporters in order to divert Polish resentment from themselves and from the pre-Gomulka regime.

No less than twelve speakers at the meeting touched on the matter of anti-Semitism. Most of them directly charged Deputy Prime Minister Zanon Nowak, one of the

*Also known as the Natolin group; before October they used to meet at a state farm in Natolin near Warsaw.

leaders of the pro-Moscow faction, with having attempted to launch an anti-Semitic campaign in the party at the previous Plenary Meeting, the Seventh, which had been held just after the Foznan uprising last July. They now condemned Nowak's newest demand, which was to cut down the number of Jews employed in the party and government. Some of the speakers called the proposal an attempt to revive the pre-war Polish *numerus clausus* for Jewish high school and university students. Nowak answered that it was "in the best interests of those who are against anti-Semitism."

But when one of Nowak's close collaborators, former Polish Politburo member Kazimierz Mijal, took the floor, he used language identical with that flaunted in Russia in the years 1950-53, when Stalin was liquidating the Jewish members of the Russian party and government. Mijal said: "We must recognize that the enemy and the bigot have joined the process of democratization en masse. It appears that the main centers of radio and party press propaganda are being taken over, against the will of the party and against the vital interests of the party, the working classes, and the people's power, by a degenerate clique of careerists and political gamblers who have nothing in common with the party and the working class. These unprincipled cosmopolites, like cats, are never taken by surprise. In every situation, they always manage to land on their feet—they are, it is said, always first in line, always in the front row. With brazen insolence, and without reason, old revolutionaries and old Communists are now brutally assaulted and branded as 'semi-intellectuals,' 'anti-Semites,' 'conservatives,' 'enemies of democracy,' 'oppressors,' and 'Stalinists.'"

More details about this kind of anti-Semitic agitation were disclosed by the most courageous paper in Poland, the weekly *Po Prostu* (Plain Speaking).^{*} In its

^{*}It is published by a group of undergraduates and recent graduates of Warsaw University. Its 150,000 copies sell out minutes after their appearance on the streets.

issues of January 6 and 13, 1957, it published long lead articles on anti-Semitism in Poland. Among the revelations they contained was that the pro-Moscow group had gone round the country telling party members that the reason for the poverty in which they lived was the "seventy Jewish directors of the State Planning Board," and that the really horrible murders and acts of torture under the previous regime had been committed by the "Jewish heads of the Security Police—the Goldberg-Rozanskis, Swiatlos, Fejgins, and Romkowskis."

Po Prostu gave other examples of the ways in which the Natolin group was trying to use anti-Semitism against Gomulka and his more liberal followers. At a recent conference of the Warsaw District party organization, voices were heard demanding that people of Jewish origin should be made to drop their Polish names (often acquired while in hiding under the Nazi occupation) in order to "make it easier to know who is a Jew and who is not." At a meeting of army officers to select one of themselves as a candidate for the Sejm elections, doubts arose whether "the man chosen was not a Jew." A popular leader of the Warsaw workers, Gozdzik, who played an immense role on the day and night of October 19 in the preparations for resistance to Soviet attack, was accused of being a waverer "because he spent his last vacation in Israel" (which was not true).

The Polish Communist party's Central Committee was obviously so perturbed by the Natolin group's anti-Semitic agitation that, in addition to condemning anti-Semitism in general terms, it called on the Politburo to investigate the question of "right-wing-nationalist deviation" inside the party and report its findings to a future plenary meeting of the Committee.

IN POLAND people now talk freely. Though the censor still watches everything printed and broadcast, even in the newspapers and in radio broadcasts the truth is no longer hidden between the lines or disguised in parables. Patently, the pro-Moscow group

has decided to try to dodge responsibility for the past years of terror and economic misery by shifting it on to those "Stalinists" in Poland who happen to be Jews.

During the bleakest Stalinist period, from 1949 to 1954, three men ruled Poland: Boleslaw Bierut, Jacob Berman, and Hilary Minc: they were the willing instruments of Stalin's will. Bierut controlled the party machine as its First Secretary (a post he assumed after jailing Gomulka). Berman supervised the Security Police, foreign affairs, and culture (literature, press, and radio). Minc implemented the economic plans Moscow imposed on its largest European satellite. Bierut died in Moscow during the 20th Soviet Party Congress, in March 1956. Berman and Minc, both Jews, are still alive, but have been removed from their public offices and now live half in hiding, hated and despised. Moscow decided, apparently, to sacrifice these two for the sake of saving whatever might still be saved in Poland.

In April 1956, Khrushchev came to Warsaw for Bierut's funeral, after which he attended the Sixth Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist party, at which (as we have seen from the minutes of the Eighth Plenary Meeting) he tried to save the crumbling authority of the Moscow faction by inciting the Polish Communists to a campaign that would unload upon the Jews the responsibility for the terror and want brought to postwar Poland by her Communist regime. It is most unlikely that the other Kremlin bosses were unaware of what Khrushchev was doing.

Those Polish Communists who responded to his incitement well knew that in the following months much fuel would be poured on the fire they were lighting. The sad truth is that the Tenth Department of the Polish Security Police included many Jews (Swiatlo, Fejgin, Romkowski, and others), and that this department, together with the head of the interrogation section, Rozanski, was responsible for the unspeakable suffering of thousands of men and wom-

en whose only crime was that they had been considered unreliable by the ruling clique.

Rozanski, Fejgin, and the rest had been appointed to their jobs in 1944 or 1945 by Russian "advisers," and assigned to Poland by the Soviet NKVD. These creatures, some of whom were psychopathic personalities, were evidently chosen by their Russian masters because they were thought to be immune to Polish nationalism. Most of their victims were non-Communist Polish patriots. But in 1948, when Moscow turned against Tito, the Tenth Department launched a reign of terror inside the Polish Communist movement itself. It was then that Gomulka, Spychalski, and some other Polish "National Communists" were thrown into prison. They survived, to return to power triumphantly, but many others—nobody will ever know how many—Communists and non-Communists, and not a few Jews among them, disappeared forever in the "private prisons" of the Tenth Department.

Except for Swiatlo, who escaped in time, the officials of the Tenth Department are now in prison awaiting trial. At the Eighth Plenary Meeting, members of the Moscow faction complained one after the other that Gomulka (though they did not mention his name) was protecting "some people" from trial and punishment, as well as shielding those already arrested. Two names were repeatedly mentioned in this connection: Zambrowski and Berman. When Mijal, the most arrogant member of the faction, spoke about "cats who always land on their feet," he was clearly aiming at Zambrowski among others.

THE first Jewish friend I met when I arrived in Warsaw on December 1, 1956, was as representative of the state of mind of the Jewish population in Poland as all the many other Jews I saw and talked with during my three weeks' stay. His mood was one of utter despair and panic.

Not many Polish Jews had survived the war. Of the three and a half millions

living in pre-war Poland, some three million perished, most of them at the hands of the Nazis, but some others in Russian forced-labor camps or "places of exile." As soon as the war ended most of the surviving Jews fled Poland. Nobody knows the exact number that remained. It may be fifty thousand, but it may, on the other hand, be as high as ninety thousand, if all the Jews who changed their names during and after the war, and who deliberately severed their former religious and communal ties, are included.

Some of the Jews who stayed in Poland were Communists or Communist sympathizers who had decided to throw in their lot with the new regime. Many were middle-class people of some education who, though originally not Communists, were able to rise quickly, in the absence of other qualified personnel, to high party and government posts. For these, the recent upheaval in Poland has become a personal catastrophe. Their adherence to the pre-Gomulka regime now lays them open not only to attack as Stalinists, but to being used as scapegoats by the very same people they once served body and soul. Not only are they isolated inside the Communist party, they have become second-class citizens in Poland at large, held up to shame by their former bosses and allies as "cosmopolitans" without national or ideological principles.

Then there are the Jews who served in the security organs, in the "political departments" of the armed forces, and in the party machine. The new Gomulka regime is determined to cut these organizations to the bone. I was told that only 10 per cent of all those employed in any of these organizations are being allowed to keep their jobs. What fate awaits those dismissed?

One of the lies that Gomulka's new regime is killing is that unemployment does not exist in Communist Poland. There is actually a great deal of it. And even if there were not, the present mood of the country makes it unlikely that any former party worker or *aparatchik* will find anything but a hostile reception in most places of

employment. According to a reliable source, Jacob Berman has had to leave the Historical Institute of the Polish Labor Movement, where he had been given a job after being fired from his political posts, because people there, all of them no doubt loyal Communists, absolutely refused to accept him as a co-worker. Workers in an ordinary factory may react even more violently when they find a former *aparatchik* or secret policeman next to them at the bench.

Still a third group of Jews now see all their hopes ruined. These are the completely Polonized Jews, for the most part members of the middle class, who have acquired Polish-sounding names and even hide their origin from their own children. The recent agreement between the government and the Roman Catholic Church on the introduction of religious teaching into the public schools makes attendance at such teaching formally dependent on the free decision of the parents. In actual fact, it means that 99 per cent of the school children will attend Catholic religious classes. Children of Jewish parents will either have to be baptized or be "exposed" for what they are. In the prevailing atmosphere, this would represent a tremendous psychological shock for many of these children. Most of their parents would rather leave the country than have their children suddenly discover how different they are from others. If they cannot make sure that their children will be Poles in Poland, they prefer to have them grow up as Jews in Israel. Many of these prospective emigrants would prefer to go to the United States or some other Western country, but the possibility of visas to any place other than Israel is practically non-existent for Polish Jews.

BUT the Jews in Poland are by no means all more or less assimilated doctors, lawyers, journalists, and civil servants. In its issue of January 13, *Po Prostu* published a survey of the Jewish population of Walbrzych in Lower Silesia, which has one of the largest Jewish communities in present-

day Poland. According to this survey, 800 Jews were employed in cooperatives, producing clothes, shoes, and so forth; 150 worked in coal mines and heavy industry; there were seven engineers with university diplomas; 25 were higher technicians; 30 were doctors, and 20 were described as "economists." It is likely that a survey of the Jewish community of Warsaw or Cracow would show a higher proportion of middle-class people as against manual workers. I met many Jews in Warsaw who were very high civil servants, or editors of important papers and magazines, or who worked in the state broadcasting station. But even in Warsaw the majority of Jews are workers. And the working-class Jews, too, are afraid.

Panic, the urge to emigrate, has seized all the Jews of Poland. While I was in Warsaw the Communist-controlled Jewish Social and Cultural Society held a two-day conference attended by delegates from all the surviving Jewish communities of Poland (Warsaw, Lodz, Cracow, Wroclaw, Walbrzych, Szczecin, Dzierzanow, Bielawy, and a few others). Till then, the Communists who control Jewish public life in Poland had branded all talk of emigration as treason. But at this conference they surrendered completely, and it was unanimously decided not only to accept emigration as an expression of the will of the majority of Polish Jews, but actively to assist it. Nor was this all. The community leaders were so overborne that they had to promise to give more truthful information than before, in the Yiddish daily press of Poland and in other publications, about Jewish life abroad.

FROM personal observation, and from talks with some of these Communist community leaders, I got the impression that at heart they were still the same as when they had publicly joined in the scurrilous campaign in 1953 against the Moscow Jewish doctors who were falsely accused of trying to poison Soviet leaders on orders from American Jewish "plutocrats." Yet such was the feeling of the delegates to this conference

that these leaders had had to assent to a solution whereby the Jews of Poland would leave their homes in a Communist country for an uncertain future in the "capitalist" world.

The mood of despair prevailing among non-assimilated Jews in Poland is, of course, caused to a great extent by the uncertain position of the new regime, exposed as it is to attacks both from without and from within. But these Jews also fear a more immediate danger.

The collapse of the former terrorist regime has brought in its wake a great weakening of all state authority, including that of the militia, which is the ordinary police of Poland. While I was in Poland crowds attacked and wrecked the Soviet consulate in Szczecin while the militia stood by without interfering. Back in June, during the uprising in Poznan, the militia-police was already in an advanced state of disintegration; by now it is a demoralized body of frightened men who run home to hide as soon as trouble brews in the streets.

In December a Jew was killed in Wroclaw by drunken soldiers. In Szczecin a store was wrecked because of a Jew who was working in it. In Walbrzych some houses where Jews lived were covered one night with anti-Semitic slogans. At the Jewish conference mentioned above, some speakers complained of having been dismissed from their jobs on the charge of being "Stalinists," but in reality because they were Jewish. In articles by Gentiles in the Polish press, many examples have been given showing that reductions in staff were resulting in a disproportionately high number of dismissals of Jewish employees.

The last remnants of what was once a great Jewry are leaving Poland. Last December twenty thousand Jews registered for visas with the Israeli consulate in Warsaw. The Polish government not only does not hinder them, but has publicly declared its readiness to help them emigrate. Thus a great, and in the end a sad, chapter of Jewish history is rapidly nearing its close. In two or three years Poland will be a country practically without Jews.

Two thousand young people gathered in December, in Warsaw's largest hall, to dissolve the old totalitarian Union of Polish Youth and proclaim the real ideas of the progressive and radical young Poles. Some were university students, others workers and peasants. Some wore the uniforms of officers and non-coms in the army and air force. They came from every corner of the country, elected by tens of thousands of other young Poles. They unanimously chose as their chairman, and as reporter of their steering committee, a young Jewish intellectual named Roman Zimand. There were very few Jews in the hall, but they took more than their share in the debates heard at this remarkable gathering.

Poland's university students, as always in this part of the world, play an immense role not only as natural leaders of the country's youth, but also as the militant

vanguard of the whole nation. But whereas before the war the Polish universities were citadels of anti-Semitism, today their students, together with their professors, have taken the lead in a determined fight against anti-Semitism. They now see in it—and they say so in the press, over the radio, and at public meetings—a traitorous movement aiming to rob the Poles of their newly won, even if restricted, freedom. They also see in it a challenge to all their beliefs in the dignity of man, which the tragic experiences of the last two decades have taught them to value more highly than at any time before.

These young people will fight anyone who threatens their freedom, no matter what the odds against them. But the remnants of Polish Jewry are too tired to fight. Who can blame them? May they find peace in some other corner of the world.